

## **Mozart's *Requiem***

### **ONE-MINUTE NOTES**

Three short choral works from successive centuries precede Mozart's *Requiem* on this program.

**Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*** is a perfect miniature, in structure, reverence and beauty. **Rheinberger's *Abendlied*** for a *cappella* chorus, from the pen of a forgotten 19th-century romantic, is a lovely and spiritual piece. **Parry's *Flame***, also for unaccompanied chorus, represents the modern age, but with a text that draws on Buddha.

**Mozart's *Requiem*** is one of choral music's undisputed masterpieces. Yet it presents a paradox, since it was incomplete when Mozart died. We hear the completion by his student Franz Xaver Süssmayr, at once noble and sobering. The genius and power of Mozart's splendid choral and solo vocal writing grip one's attention throughout this moving, powerful *Requiem*.

**MOZART: *Ave verum corpus*, K. 618**

#### **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**

**Born:** January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

**Died:** December 5, 1791, in Vienna, Austria

**Composed:** June 1791

**World Premiere:** Undocumented, but probably for the Feast of Corpus Christi in Baden, June 23, 1791

**NJSO Premiere:** These performances are the NJSO premiere.

**Duration:** 4 minutes

Six months before his untimely death, Mozart escorted his wife and young son, Karl, to the spa town of Baden to take the waters. He had a good friend there in Anton Stoll, Baden's choir master and organist. After Mozart's return to Vienna, Stoll did many favors for Constanze. Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*—the first sacred music he had written in eight years—was a gift of thanks to Stoll, who also championed Mozart's music. This exquisite setting is a perfect choral jewel, and surely the most serene of Mozart's sacred works.

*Instrumentation: mixed chorus, organ and strings.*

## **RHEINBERGER: *Abendlied*, Op. 69 No. 3**

### **JOSEPH RHEINBERGER**

**Born:** March 17, 1839, in Vaduz, Liechtenstein

**Died:** November 25, 1901, in Munich

**Composed:** 1855, revised 1863

**World Premiere:** undocumented, but possibly in Munich in 1855

**NJSO Premiere:** These performances are the NJSO premiere.

**Duration:** 3 minutes

In the extravagant world of 19th-century German romantic music, Rheinberger has been relegated to footnote status. In his day, he was a celebrated organist and composer who became one of Munich's most respected and sought-after composition professors. He is best remembered for his organ works and sacred music. Rheinberger favored traditional counterpoint and a conservative harmonic vocabulary rooted in Classical tradition.

His motet *Abendlied* ("Evening Song") for unaccompanied chorus is based on a verse from Luke 24:29. Written in the style of the Renaissance master Palestrina, this lovely movement evokes the serenity of dusk and the spiritual message of the Biblical text.

*Instrumentation: six-part a cappella chorus.*

## **PARRY: *Flame* for mixed chorus**

### **BEN PARRY**

**Born:** January 25, 1965, in Ipswich, England

**Composed:** 2011, immediately after Garth Bardsley completed the poem

**World Premiere:** March 4, 2012, at Camden Roundhouse, London in a live national radio broadcast by the BBC Singers.

**NJSO Premiere:** These performances are the NJSO premiere.

**Duration:** 5 minutes

A graduate of Cambridge University, Ben Parry enjoys a busy career balancing composition, conducting, arranging, singing and producing. He works regularly with many British choruses and is artistic director and principal conductor of the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, as well as assistant director of music at King's College, Cambridge. His music is published by Peters Edition.

*Flame* is one of several collaborations Parry has completed with poet Garth Bardsley. Both Bardsley's text and Parry's inspirational music take their message from the writings of Buddha: happiness never decreases by being shared.

*Instrumentation: mixed chorus.*

### **THE PARRY-BARDSLEY COLLABORATION**

Poet Garth Bardsley has graciously provided the following additional background to his text and Ben Parry's music for *Flame*:

Award-winning opera director Garth Bardsley studied at St John's College in Cambridge. He has worked extensively as an actor, singer, writer and director. As a poet and lyricist, he has collaborated with the

noted British composer Ben Parry for more than 10 years. Their many works have been performed at major venues across the world including the Kennedy Center, Washington, DC, National Cathedral and the Royal Albert Hall. Bardsley also writes with the award-winning American composer, Gregory Wanamaker. Specializing in performance practice, Bardsley lectures at the Royal Northern College of Music, Bath Spa University and London's Royal College of Music.

*"Flame* has a special place in my heart," he says. "Ben and I were working on a series of Christmas Carols and I had managed to write a truly awful poem entitled 'The Candle Lit On Christmas Day' — clearly composed before the coffee break—which Ben rejected before he had reached the end of the first verse. There was however, something appealing about the theme, so I had another go. This new poem, 'Flame,' was completed within an hour. Another hour later, Ben had created pretty much the whole of this truly exquisite and inspirational choral work. It has now been sung all around the world from New Zealand to Hong Kong, from Iceland to China. It has also been sung in many American states and received its US premiere at the Crane School of Music in Potsdam, New York."

– Garth Bardsley

## **MOZART: *Requiem*, K. 626**

### **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**

**Composed:** 1791

**Duration:** 48 minutes

**World Premiere:** January 2, 1793, in Vienna, Austria

**NJSO Premiere:** Summer 1998, featuring Margaret Cahn, Paula Rasmussen, Glenn Siebert, John Cheek and Pro Arte Chorale. Zdenek Macal conducted.

In December 1790, Joseph Haydn left Austria for London with the violinist and entrepreneur Johann Peter Salomon. He spent his last day in Vienna with Mozart. When they parted, Mozart embraced his friend and said, "Papa, I fear that this will be our last farewell." Haydn, no longer young at 59, took

Mozart's remark to be concerned for his welfare on such a long journey to a distant country. As it happened, Mozart's words were prophetic of his own death. Haydn outlived his younger contemporary by 18 years and produced superb music in his old age. When he died in 1809, the work performed at his funeral was the Mozart *Requiem*.

Mozart rarely composed without a specific commission, and the *Requiem* was no exception. During summer 1791, he was hard at work with Emanuel Schikaneder on *The Magic Flute*. The new opera went into rehearsal in July. About the same time, a mysterious stranger presented himself to Mozart at his residence, with an unusual assignment: a *Requiem* mass, to be composed and delivered as soon as possible. The stranger declined to identify himself or the originator of the commission and cautioned Mozart not to attempt to learn anything further about his employer.

We know these facts from written reports by Mozart's contemporaries, including his widow, Constanze, and her second husband, Georg Nikolaus Nissen, who was one of Mozart's first biographers. Only after Mozart's death did the full story emerge. Count Walsegg-Stuppach, an Austrian nobleman and music lover, fancied himself a composer. Lacking real talent, he often commissioned works by well-known composers for private performance, recopying the works to pass them off as his own.

In February 1791, the Count's wife died. Stricken, Walsegg resolved to secure a *Requiem* to be performed annually on the anniversary of her death. He sent the messenger to Mozart with the request, instructing his representative to maintain secrecy.

Needing money, Mozart accepted the project and set to work, then put the *Requiem* aside when Emperor Leopold II was to be crowned King of Bohemia. For that occasion, Mozart was asked to compose an opera seria. Composing with lightning speed, he completed most of *La clemenza di Tito* in an astonishing 18 days, before travelling to Prague to supervise rehearsals and the premiere. His frenetic pace included ongoing work preparing for *The Magic Flute*'s opening. One starts to understand the extreme degree of nervous exhaustion that compromised his health.

After Mozart returned from a trip to Prague in September 1791, the unidentified emissary called on him repeatedly to check on its progress. Unable to determine the origin of the eerie commission and drained from overwork, Mozart became convinced that a messenger from the netherworld had been sent: that he was composing *his own Requiem*.

At this point, Mozart's health deteriorated. Battling dizziness, headaches, swelling and nausea, he continued to work on the Requiem. With the assistance of a composition student, Franz Xaver Süssmayr (1766–1803), he sketched several movements, orchestrating the first few measures of some, concentrating on the vocal lines, providing only limited instrumental detail in others. At Mozart's death on December 5, the *Requiem* lay incomplete.

Constanze Mozart was unable to collect the fee owed to her late husband until the missing parts were completed. She approached several Viennese composers, eventually settling for Süssmayr, who had worked closely with Mozart during his last months.

One of Süssmayr's cleverest ploys to conceal the participation of a second composer was to conclude the work with the repetition of the music heard at the beginning. Mozart had used this same type of self-quotation in earlier masses, so the tactic was stylistically consistent—and very convincing. So successful was Süssmayr's reconstruction and completion that the *Requiem* has become one of the most frequently performed choral works in the classical repertoire. Also because of Süssmayr, the *Requiem* is a thorny topic in Mozart scholarship, with musicologists and performers debating how much of the music is Mozart's and how much his gifted student's. The *Requiem's* inherent beauty and remarkable contrapuntal skill assure its following, regardless of questions about authenticity.

### **About the music**

Such an embarrassment of riches graces the *Requiem* that singling out individual movements is gratuitous. The overall impact of the work is heightened by the relationship of each movement to the next. Mozart's subtle migration between tonal centers and his negotiation between major and minor

modes exercise psychological power. But the sound that rings in our ears for hours afterward is the dark, vigorous fugue of the Kyrie, repeated at the end of the work for the Cum sanctis tuis. Its resolution on stark open fifths, unsweetened by a major third and unmitigated by even a D-minor chord, is a chilling reminder that this is music of death.

*Instrumentation: two bassoons, two basset horns (played by clarinets in most modern performances), two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, organ, strings, mixed chorus and soprano, alto, tenor and bass soloists.*

### **MOZART, THE MOVIES AND MISCONCEPTIONS**

Thanks to Peter Shaffer's award-winning play *Amadeus* (1979) and Milos Forman's remarkable film (1984) based on the play, Mozart's character and music have been absorbed into mainstream culture. Reinforcement came in 1991, with the bicentennial observation of Mozart's death, and in 2006, when festivals worldwide celebrated his 250th birthday.

A singular benefit of these Mozart phenomena has been more widespread familiarity with Mozart's music, which continues in unabated popularity on piano recitals, in concert halls, opera houses and elsewhere. This ubiquity has spawned a generation of new Mozart-lovers, who are discovering the beauty and variety of his works for the first time. But any popularization is something of a double-edged sword. Unfortunately, in hand with this exposure have been a number of misconceptions and factual errors about the circumstances of Mozart's life and death.

Nowhere is this problem more evident or more acute than in the case of the *Requiem*. Shaffer's play and Forman's film adjusted characters and situations for maximum dramatic and cinematic effect. Inevitably, this resulted in some distortion of what actually took place. (For example, Antonio Salieri took no part in completing the *Requiem*, as the movie implies.) Truth is indeed stranger than fiction, and the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Requiem* are so remarkable that no embellishment is necessary.

## A WORD ON MOZART'S NAME

Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791, not quite 36 years old. He was baptized with the names Joannes Chrysost[omus] Wolfgangus Theophilus. His parents gave him the names Johann and Chrysostom because he was born on that saint's day. Wolfgang was the first name of Mozart's maternal grandfather. The name Theophilus (Greek for "beloved of God") came from the godfather, Joannes Theophilus Pergmayr, a Salzburg businessman and local official. Days after the boy's birth, Leopold referred to his infant son as Gottlieb (the German for Theophilus). Amadeus is the Latin form.

In letters, the composer signed his name variously as "Mozart," "W.A. Mozart," "Wolfg. Amad. Mozart," "MZT," "Wolf. Amdè Mozart" and, most frequently, "Wolfgang Amadè Mozart." As a boy in Italy, he occasionally signed in the Italian spelling: "Wolfgango Amadeo." Despite Peter Shaffer's stage play *Amadeus* and Miloš Forman's even more popular film, Mozart did not use the name Amadeus.

In recent years, the spelling "Wolfgang Amadè Mozart" has supplanted the old-fashioned "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart" in common usage and printed programs. The glory of his music remains unchanged.